

VZCZCXRO9811
OO RUEHDA
DE RUEHAK #0797/01 1191416
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 281416Z APR 08
FM AMEMBASSY ANKARA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6092
RUEKJCS/CJCS WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC IMMEDIATE
RUEKJCS/OSD WASHDC//PA
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
INFO RUEHTH/AMEMBASSY ATHENS 8849
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4161
RUEHDA/AMCONSUL ADANA 2888
RUEHBS/AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS 6572
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO 6401
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 2977
RUEUITH/DET 1 39LG ANKARA TU
RHMFISS/USDOCO 6ATAF IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39OS INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 523 IZMIR TU
RHMFISS/39ABG INCIRLIK AB TU
RHMFISS/AFOSI DET 522 INCIRLIK AB TU
RUEUITH/AFLO ANKARA TU

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000797

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

MONDAY, APRIL 28, 2008

In Today's Papers

Deniz Baykal Reelected Party Chairman at CHP Congress

All news outlets report on Deniz Baykal's reelection as party chairman of the main opposition CHP at a party convention held in Ankara over the weekend. Baykal, who ran as the sole candidate, received 1021 votes of 1105 party delegates, and the remaining 84 votes were invalid. Baykal's challengers Haluk Koc, Umut Oran, and Ayhan Yalcinkaya could not run for the party leadership because they failed to collect the signatures of 20 percent of the total 1231 delegates. Reports say that Baykal reshuffled party council members and board members, removing dissenting voices until at least the local elections to be held in 2009.

In his three-hour long speech to the congress, Baykal emphasized secularism. "Everyone will have the right to teach children religion, but the state will remain secular as well as our legal and education system. This golden synthesis of Islam and secularism exists only in Turkey," Baykal said. He lashed out at the West for not supporting Turkey when Turks were struggling for independence for building a democracy after World War I. Baykal also recalled the alleged involvement of the US in the 1980 military takeover in Turkey, claiming the West had adopted a hypocritical attitude concerning Turkey and democracy.

A Sunday column in mainstream Vatan writes that at the congress, "Baykal did not propose a solution to the problems Turkey faces. He recommended opponents leave the CHP and set up a new political party. The CHP is small and will remain small. Anyone who asks questions will be expelled, but the CHP will remain Deniz Baykal's. No one should be hopeful about the next convention either, because Baykal will be re-elected once again by rigging the delegate structure as he wants. That would guarantee the success of the AKP or the party that will replace it in the next general elections."

Erdogan Visits Damascus for Israel-Syria Peace

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Radikal, Taraf, Cumhuriyet, Zaman and others report on Saturday, Prime Minister Erdogan paid a one-day visit to Damascus where he officially conveyed a message from Israel to Syrian President Bashar Asad that Israel is ready to withdraw from the Golan Heights in return for a lasting peace with Syria. Papers say

President Asad thanked Erdogan for Turkey's mediation and underlined that direct talks between Syria and Israel could be possible with the help of the new US administration following the presidential elections in November. Asad stressed Syria was prepared to continue cooperation with Turkey in order to achieve security and stability in the region. On his return home Saturday, Erdogan told reporters Turkey would do its best to see that the existing "adverse situation" in the region goes away. He voiced hope that talks will conclude positively. Responding to a question, Erdogan confirmed that a Turkish envoy would be visiting Israel, but did not elaborate.

Papers report Israeli Ambassador to Turkey Gabby Levi said Israel and Syria might first hold low-level talks in Turkey, to be followed up next year by a leaders' summit after the presidential elections in the US. Mainstream Sabah quotes former Israeli Foreign Ministry Undersecretary Alon Liel as saying Erdogan receive the Nobel Peace Prize for brokering a peace between Israel and Syria.

Editorial Opinion: Turkey's Effort for Mediating on the Syria-Israel Dispute

"The US-Syrian Relation is Problematic"

Washington-based Omer Taspinar wrote in leftist Taraf (4/28): "Two days before Turkish PM Erdogan's trip to Syria, the US Congress started discussing a report on Syria's nuclear program, helped by North Korea. This story, for some reason, did not make any big news

ANKARA 00000797 002 OF 003

in the Turkish media. Turkey, while remains enthusiastic to mediate between Syria and Israel, it should also watch closely the developments in Washington on this issue. On the Israel-Syria negotiations, I don't see a single voice in Washington. There is a serious difference of opinion between the US State Department and VP Cheney's office. While Rice tries to be pragmatic and result-oriented with Middle East problems, Dick Cheney acts like a genuine hawk. The report about the North Korean-Syrian cooperation on a nuclear program gives an enormous opportunity to the administration's hawks because they can put more pressure on Syria, North Korea and Iran. The details about the Syria-Israel talks that Turkey seems enthusiastic to mediate are all unknown. Turkey seems optimistic but there are serious question marks in Washington. It remains to be seen whether White House hawks are really looking for a solution. An American official was commenting in a sarcastic way when he said 'one has to appreciate that Turkey is working very hard for Middle East peace while it already has a lot of its own problems.' There is a hidden message in this sarcasm."

Erdogan-Sarkisian Exchange Goodwill Messages

Papers report over the weekend and Monday the prime ministers of Turkey and Armenia voiced a desire to normalize ties between the two neighboring countries. Prime Minister Erdogan said in a congratulatory message to his new Armenian counterpart Tigran Sarkisian that in this new era, Turkey-Armenia ties can contribute to peace, stability and prosperity in the region. Erdogan underlined that the earlier Turkish proposals made to the Armenian side were "still on the table." Sarkisian response said that direct bilateral talks would help resolve problems and confirmed "the readiness of the Armenian government for a constructive dialogue and establishment of normal ties between the two countries, without conditions." "Both of us bear a historic mission to create an atmosphere of mutual trust, without which dialogue and a solution to the existing problems will be impossible,"

Two Soldiers Killed in Clash with PKK

Sabah, Milliyet, Hurriyet, Cumhuriyet, Vatan and others: Two soldiers were killed in a clash with PKK terrorists in Bingol province. Meanwhile Sunday's Hurriyet reports that the Turkish General Staff announced that two separate air strikes were launched

in Northern Iraq against PKK terrorists trying to infiltrate into Turkey, and that the operation was backed by land forces.

US: "We Don't want to be a side in AKP Closure Case"

Mainstream Milliyet on Sunday reported that speaking at the US House of Representatives Foreign Relations Committee's European Sub Committee, US Under Secretary of State Dan Fried said on AKP closure case and secularism discussions in Turkey that "the current disagreement should be resolved within the framework of democracy and the constitutional secular system. We do not want to be a side in this issue." Today's Milliyet carries the reactions of the AKP deputies to the remarks of Fried. While some AKP deputies saying that political parties are assurances of secularism, some others said that "what the US or EU says is not important."

Editorial Opinion: AKP Closure Case/US-Turkey

"US Fine Tuning on the Closure Case"

Semih Idiz wrote in mainstream Milliyet (4/28): "The European Union initially evaluated the AKP closure case solely in a democracy context, but soon after added an emphasis on secularism. It looks like the US is following suit. A recent statement by Dan Fried on the closure case is the latest example of this following Secretary Rice's earlier speech at ATC expressing hope to see a decision within secular and democratic values. Only a few days before Rice's statement, Department Spokesman McCormack talked about the necessity to interpret Turkey's laws and constitution free from political influence, which was seen as support for the ruling AKP. Washington has felt the need to fine tune its approach and clues of this can be

ANKARA 00000797 003 OF 003

found in statements of both Rice and Fried. Washington is following the closure case very closely because the result will have an impact on American regional policies. Prominent opinion makers in the US have started to warn Washington about the seriousness threat of religious fundamentalism here, and this has had an impact on Washington's fine tuning its rhetoric. Washington realizes that if it intrudes, it may negatively affect the debate in Turkey on the issue. Therefore, the US will maintain a neutral approach. It will not go beyond expressing hope for a solution under the framework of democracy and constitutional secularism."

TV News:
CNN Turk

Domestic News

- The trial of suspects charged with killing Armenian Turkish journalist Hrant Dink will continue in Istanbul on Monday.
- On Tuesday, the parliament is to discuss the amendments to the controversial Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code.
- The second 'Azerbaijan-Turkey Media Conference' will take place in Baku on Tuesday.

International News

- Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Muhammad Ali Hosseini said a US attack on Iran is "unlikely" because the American military is bogged down in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- Hamas leader in exile Khaled Mashaal told al-Jazeera television the Palestinian militant group would accept an Egyptian proposal for a cease-fire with Israel.
- The United States Priority Watch List named China and Russia as among the worst violators of intellectual property rights. Turkey was removed the list.

WILSON